

G is for Gunshot Wound by [lilies_in_a_vase](#)

Series: [Lilies' Alphabet Soup of Pain \[7\]](#)

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Summary:

“They-They-“ Billy stammers out, chest heaving and eyes wide.

El’s not here.

When Billy left, El was with him. They'd wanted to go out, had spent half an hour trying to convince Jim to let them go to the diner and meet up with Max, but El's not here now.

"Where's El? Billy... Where is El?"

G is for Gunshot Wound

Author's Note:

TRIGGER WARNING:

El is kidnapped, Billy is shot in the arm, and there are references to past child abuse, as well as parents being scared their kids are dead/injured.

We have reached the fic that made me create this series in the first place! I hope you guys like it!

Jim would like to think they're doing alright.

He's not under any illusions that he's a particularly 'chill' parent, although he would like to argue he's doing better. He's protective, yes, at times even maybe probably a little overprotective, but! It's for good reason. It's not like he doesn't have experience in what being too lax can get you.

That said, he's trying to do better. He's trying to be more... understanding.

He calls Joyce before - or sometimes after - making any big decisions, if only because he knows El will call her and complain if he's being too strict. Billy won't, but Billy, well.

Billy is a different story.

After the Mindflayer, once Billy was coherent enough, they'd told him all about the Upside Down. It was the least the kid deserved after being possessed by a fucking monster. And so they'd told him, and all the kids, Steve, and Robin, had decided to hang out in his hospital room until he was well enough to go home. Then they had all, Jim included, started hanging out at Joyce's. And then, when Billy turned eighteen, his father had gifted his barely healed body with three broken ribs, and Max had called him, and Jim had arrested Neil, and Billy had moved in with him and El.

Billy may technically be an adult now, so Jim can't really adopt him, but shit, the kid is still a teenager. So Jim treats him like one, if with a bit more freedom. He gets to go out and stay out, but Jim wants to know where he goes. If he goes to a party and gets drunk, he is to call Jim to pick him up, because he'd rather loose sleep than loose another child.

It's worked pretty well, so far. In the morning, Billy and El pick up Max, and Billy drives all three of them to the high school, and if El wants to go to a party, Billy goes with, and so do the rest of the little nerds, and all is good.

Which is why, when Billy throws open the door to the cabin and stumbles inside, it comes as such an enormous shock that Jim freezes on the spot. There's a bruise high up on Billy's cheekbone, blood from his nose pooling on his upper lip and drying in that barely there baby moustache he's so stupidly proud of.

"They-They-" Billy stammers out, chest heaving and eyes wide.

El's not here.

When Billy left, El was with him. They'd wanted to go out, had spent half an hour trying to convince him to let them go to the diner and meet up with Max, but El's not here now.

"Where's El? Billy... Where is El?"

He's hoping Billy will say that she's alright, that he dropped her off at the Mayfields' new place, that she's okay, that he left them there and then got into a fight with someone from school, that it's the reason for the blood on his face.

But Billy doesn't say that. Billy looks away, like he can't meet Jim's eyes, and he says, so quietly Jim barely hears him, "They took her. Some... Some men, they blocked the road and I tried to drive past but they knocked into the Camaro and then they just... dragged her out."

Jim can picture it. He hates that he can picture it. Can imagine El, kicking and screaming as she's dragged out of the Camaro, as she does her best to fight the ones taking her but gets overwhelmed, and Jim sees red.

He's marching forward before he's even realised he's moving. Too late, he realises what he's done, what he looks like.

Jim is big, is tall, and Jim doesn't hesitate to use his fists when he's angry or sad or desperate. And right now, Jim has crowded Billy into

the corner, has made the kid press his back into the wall, and Billy still isn't looking at him. Billy's staring down at the floor, shaking, and with his cheek turned to the side as though Jim's already hit him.

For one nauseating moment, Jim has to look back in his memories of the last few seconds to make sure he hasn't. But his hands aren't raised, they're curled into fists at his sides, and they don't sting, and yet, for a moment, Jim hates himself.

He steps back, quickly.

Jim walks up to the door, grabs his hat and belt that hang on the hooks there and puts them on, his back to Billy. "I'm going to the station. I'm going to find her."

"Let me help," Billy starts. "I can--"

"No!" Jim says sharply. He breathes harshly, tries to calm himself down. Pictures Joyce telling him to breathe through it. "No," he says, a little calmer. He thinks of Billy's nose, the drying blood on his face. "I think you've done enough."

He opens the door and leaves before Billy can protest.

I can't loose another one, kid. I can't focus if you're with me.

He gets in to cruiser, and drives away.

—

After Hop leaves, the door closing behind him and the sound of the cruiser driving off, Billy has a little breakdown.

He slides to the floor, and spends a few minutes sobbing.

He let her be taken away.

Hop blames him. Shit, Billy could see it on his face, and the worst thing is that he's right to. For all the fights Billy's been in, all the practice he's had, none of it was any help.

Logically, Billy knows there wasn't much he could've done. They were too many, at least a few of them had guns, and with El's powers still mostly gone the two of them really were at a disadvantage. It's not shocking.

But he still failed to protect her. Hop trusted him to protect his daughter, and Billy *failed* .

Hop hadn't even wanted them to go out. He's been hesitant for longer than Billy's even lived here, like he's worried something like what happened this summer, last autumn, the year before, will happen again.

And it's not like he's alone. Hell, the kids seem to be handling the entire shitshow the best. Billy's had to stop on to the way to school some mornings, has needed to pull over for panic attacks. As much as El's powers have been acting up since she pulled that piece of Mindflayer out of her leg, the two of them still seem to hold some sort of connection. She usually manages to go into the Void and pull him out of his own panicked mind, anyhow.

And now Billy's let her be taken away.

He drags a hand over his face, and blinks when it comes away bloody.

Right. He got punched in the nose.

He needs to get cleaned up.

Billy pulls himself up to standing and walks into the bathroom.

It's not too bad. Neil's given him worse, before. Billy leans closer to the mirror, bending a little over the sink and leaning his head back and to the sides to assess the damage. He turns on the water, wetting his hand and reaching up to scrub the dried blood off his chin-

When his reflection suddenly disappears, and for a second, he thinks he sees El, right before she drags him into the Void.

“They think I’m still asleep,” she says quickly. The last thing Billy had seen before they’d left was someone pushing a syringe into her neck. “I don’t know how long I can keep you here, so just listen. You know the gas station we stopped at on the way to your birthday dinner?”

Billy nods. Once he got out of the hospital, Hop had got the whole party together, and at Steve’s recommendation they’d driven off to the next town over to celebrate Billy turning eighteen. El had needed to stop to go to the bathroom.

“I think we were on that road, but they pulled off into the woods, and-“

Billy blinks, and he’s back in the bathroom.

“El?!” he calls, closing his eyes and willing his mind to open up to her, but she doesn’t come back. Fuck. Shit.

Billy might now where she is. Knows where to start at least.

He finishes cleaning his face up as best he can before rushing back out into the living room and running up to the phone. He presses down the numbers for the police station, Flo answering almost

immediately.

“You’ve reached Hawkins Police Station, how can we help you?”

“Hey, Flo, it’s Billy. I need to talk to Hop.”

“Just a second, hon.” She forwards the call to Hop, who picks up a moment later.

“Hey, Hop, I-“

“Listen, Billy, I don’t have time for this.”

He feels himself falter. “But-“

“No. I don’t want, and I don’t need, you to do anything. Just stay home, and let me deal with this. Alright?”

“But I-“

“Bye, kid.”

Hop hangs up on him. Billy stares down at the phone in his hand in

disbelief. Well, fuck.

Guess Billy will have to deal with this himself.

—

Billy doesn't stop banging on the door until Steve opens, Robin behind him. He doesn't spare any time for pleasantries, just throws, "El's been kidnapped. Get in the car. Now." over his shoulder as he turns around and walks back to the Camaro.

Billy's just sat down and put his seatbelt on when the doors to the backseat are thrown open and Steve and Robin climb in.

"The hell do you mean, 'El's been kidnapped'?!" Steve shouts.

Billy pulls away from the driveway and starts racing out of Hawkins.

"I was driving us home, and some men came, blocked the road and hit the car, and dragged her out. She reached me through the Void though, so I think I know where she is."

"What men?" Robin asks. "Russians?"

“I don’t know. I didn’t exactly stop to talk to them. I hit one, he punched me back, the rest pushed me away and then the pulled her into one of their cars.”

“Shit,” Steve breathes.

“Don’t tell the kids,” Billy hurries to say. “No need to worry them if we can get her back. They’d do something stupid.”

Steve laughs shakily. “Yeah, like take your car and stuff me in the backseat and have Max drive it out to a pumpkin field in the dark.”

Billy smirks, despite himself, and catches Steve’s eye through the rear view mirror. “Just be glad they got Max to drive and it wasn’t one of your little shits. Max’s not a bad driver. I taught her.”

“And we all know that you’re such a responsible driver,” Robin says.

“Obviously not,” Billy scoffs. “I mean. She was thirteen when I taught her.”

As he drives, nearing the gas station, he keeps an eye out for where the men who took El might’ve pulled off.

Finally, he catches an exist, over grown and easy to miss unless

you're looking for it, and drives past it. He parks at the gas station, and turns around to look at the other two.

"I'm going to go look for her, alright, and you two are staying here. One of you get in the driver's seat. In case shit goes bad, I want us to have a quick getaway." He doesn't wait for an answer, just jumps out of the car and slams the door after himself, hurrying back down the road.

Behind him, one of the Camaro's doors opens, and he hears Steve call out after him. "Hey! Does Hop know we're here?"

Billy pretends he didn't hear him.

—

It's a one floor building, old and pretty derelict looking. From the outside, it would look abandoned if it weren't for the five or so cars parked outside. It might've been a school, once. Maybe.

He sneaks around to the back, figures he'll probably have to pick the lock once he finds a backdoor, but to his surprise, it opens as soon as he pulls down the handle. Either this is just a temporary hideaway, or they're not that sharp.

Or maybe they're just so full of themselves they can't imagine anyone would ever be able to find them.

He ends up in a long corridor, thankfully empty.

He didn't really have a plan, other than hope to find El and sneak her out. Maybe knock someone out for good measure.

There's a door with a bathroom sign on it, and Billy sneaks inside. At first glance, it, too, is empty, and Billy's starting to get worried they just dumped their cars here and exchanged them for some others, that he wouldn't be able to identify.

Still, he opens the first stall door, then the second, third, but they're all empty. He's about to reach for the fourth, when he hears the sound of someone humming, whistling a little. Getting closer.

Billy hurries into one of ten stalls he'd just checked and locks it just as the door to the bathroom opens.

The man walks into one of the other stalls, that Billy left open, and stops humming as he gets to do his business. While he's in there, Billy gently opens his own stall, taking care to not have the door slam as he closes it. He goes to stand outside the stall the man is in, and waits.

And waits.

The toilet flushes, the man opens the door, and Billy, standing right behind it, slams it back closed so it hits the other man and forces him back inside.

The man is stumbling back into the toilet, his zipper undone and hands reaching out to catch him when Billy steps into the stall, immediately grabbing the him and punching the man in the face, pushing him down into the floor. He hits his head against the toilet seat on his way down and is out like a light.

Billy spares one second to think, and then he decides that he doesn't really have time for that, and that first thought will simply have to be the best thought.

He drags the man out and starts stripping him of his pants and shirt. Next, he drops his own jeans down in the stall, and his shirt, changing into the man's clothes. Like in the movies.

He takes the man's gun, too, and his walkie, hooking them both at his belt, even though Billy's never shot a gun before. Neil never wanted him to learn. Never wanted to give him a way to defend himself.

He drags the man into the stall, locking the door and standing up on the toilet to haul himself over into the next stall. Figures that if his friends go looking they'll think he's still in there.

Next, he closes his eyes and tries to call out to El. He doesn't know what the hell he's doing, really, but he figure she must be here, and if

he just tries to open his mind up to her and really think about her, maybe she'll find him. Will be able to tell him which room they've got her in.

But of course, nothing happens. Because Billy couldn't possibly be that lucky. This shit couldn't have been just a tiny bit easier.

He leaves the bathroom, standing outside the next door and straining to find out if he can hear voices from inside. When all he hears is quite, he figures there's no one in there, or if there is, it's just one person, and opens the door.

It's a supply closet.

Billy scoffs, but fuck it, why not? He grabs a mop and bucket, figures if someone asks he'll just pretend he's cleaning shit up. Hope there's enough of them that they won't recognise him.

He opens another room. It's big, and it's empty. Literally completely empty.

The next room, however, turns out to be more fruitful.

It's a control room, of sorts. Filled with surveillance footage. Billy hadn't even noticed there were cameras in the corridor. Jesus, he's an idiot.

But at least this room, too, is empty.

And nearing the camera footage, he finds out why.

They're all in what he guesses was once a cafeteria. Eating. Sharing a bottle of something. Probably congratulating each other on a job well done, kidnapping a teenage girl. Fucking assholes.

Still, their combination of stupidity and asshole-yness is making this much easier for Billy.

He scans the rest of the cameras for El, and finds her, unconscious on the floor. She doesn't look hurt, at least, from what he can make out of the grainy grey footage. There's a window against one wall, boarded shut, but from its position in relation to the door, Billy's pretty certain he's figured out which end of the house she's in.

He hurries out, his heart racing like it's about to beat straight out his chest, and walks forward, turning a corner into a new corridor. He thinks El must be somewhere close by, and opens the first door he comes by.

It's an old science lab, but with microscopes and shit that looks brand new. It's not what he came here for, but right before closing the door again, his eyes land on a couple vials next to a syringe and he steps inside, walking up to them. There's six vials, all labelled '11' filled with some liquid. Two of them have blood in them, labelled 'Sample 1' and 'Sample 2'.

Billy grabs all of them, stuffing them into the pockets of his jacket and hoping they won't break.

He checks the rest of the rooms along the corridor, finding one with sleeping bags on the floor but no El.

"Wilson?" a man calls, from around the corner. "The hell you doing, man, opening all those doors for?" He laughs. "You forget your way to the bathroom again?"

Shit.

Billy opens the door closest and steps inside. He presses his ear to the door, and hears as the other man's steps get closer. They stop just a little bit past the door.

"Wilson?" the man calls, sounding confused. "Did that fucking cat get back inside-?"

Billy glances down at the gun he's still got strapped to his waist, the mop in his hand. He may not know how to shoot, but he does know how to hit.

He leaves the bucket to instead grab the gun, opens the door gently, and takes soft steps towards the other man.

"Wil-?" he starts to turn, but doesn't get further before Billy's pulled

his arm back and hit him in the head with the mop. He goes down in a second. Billy does his best not to think about how his finger trembles against the trigger.

Billy takes his gun, too, and rushes down the corridor he'd come from, pulling open the doors one after another.

And finally, halfway down the corridor, he finds her. There's no working lock on the door, so he figures the other man must've been standing guard, in case she woke up.

Billy falls to his knees beside her. She's lying on a sleeping bag, he realises, as he turns her on her back and starts to shake her shoulder.

It takes a minute before El's eyes start to flutter open. She's awake and alert in a second, pulling away from him and pressing herself back against the dirty wall.

"Hey, hey, El," he whispers. "It's okay. It's me, Billy. You're okay."

Recognition fills her eyes, and she breathes out, falling back against the sleeping bag.

"Did they hurt you? Can you walk?"

El shakes her head, curls bouncing. "Not hurt. I can walk."

He helps her up, taking her hand and leading her up to the door. He leaves the mop and sticks his head out first, checking the corridor's still empty before stepping out. He takes her back the way he'd come, past the passed out man on the ground and the bathroom with the other one, and out through the backdoor.

They don't go back the way Billy came, because if he's right, then taking a shortcut through the woods will actually land them closer to the gas station. And in case they realise El's gone, it will be harder to look for her if she's just disappeared somewhere among the trees.

He doesn't feel it, when it happens.

He just hears the shot ring out.

And Billy doesn't feel anything, too high on adrenaline to really feel anything at all, but El lets out a scream and he turns to stare at her.

She's turned away from him, holding her arms out in front of her, but there's no blood anywhere on her. Other than the slow trickle of red from her nostril, that is. He follows her gaze and sees two men, both with guns, behind him. Slowly, they turn them on each other, expressions panicked, and as Billy watches, two more shots ring out, and both men fall to the ground with shouts of pain.

He hadn't even realised they were being followed.

He stands there frozen, until El tugs at his hand and oh.

Oh, no, *shit* -

It feels like his left arm's on fire.

Billy doesn't want to look down. He doesn't. But it's not El forcing him to turn to look at it, to glance over his shoulder at the back of his upper arm, no, it's some sick, sadistic part of his brain that needs him to look.

The shirt Billy stole from the guy in the bathroom has a hole in it. And a steadily spreading smear of blood.

Jesus Christ.

He doesn't think he's going to die.

It's too small, too insignificant, but it reminds him too much of the way blood had pooled over his tank top, had bubbled up his throat and out through his mouth, and fuck, it hurts.

It hurts, really bad, like... like-

Billy's on his knees on the ground.

El's standing in front of him, above him, crying, scared, determined, panicked, pleading, grasping the hand of his uninjured arm and tugging.

"We have to run."

Billy doesn't know how long it's taken him to react, to hear, to move, but he nods, pushes himself to standing and takes off running with her, trying to ignore the way it feels like his arm's being cut off.

They emerge on the other side, the woods and El's wannabe kidnappers behind them, the road and the gas station in front of them, and together they run across it to the Camaro.

There are black spots dancing across Billy's vision.

He's going to throw up.

He wrenches the door to the backseat open and crashes inside, El taking the passenger seat. Distantly, he thinks he hears Steve let out a surprised shout. Hears him ask El if she's okay.

Much closer, he hears Robin swear.

"You're bleeding. What- Did you get fucking shot?!"

“Drive,” Billy mumbles, too quiet for Steve to hear but maybe Robin does, maybe she’ll tell him, maybe El will.

“Billy? Billy, no, hey. Stay awake, come on. Don’t fucking pass out on us again, you asshole, come on.”

Robin’s blurry. She’s a blurry shape of colours shifting in and out of focus and Billy’s definitely going to pass out any second now.

“Whoa!” Steve shouts, but Billy doesn’t get why. He thinks the car’s moving. He thinks he can feel the vibrations. Or maybe that’s just him swaying.

“Shut up, Stevie! You want him to bleed out in the backseat, huh?! You can give me your shirt when we get to the hospital.”

Something is pressed against his arm, where it hurts the most, hard, and shit, Billy doesn’t know if he screams or whimpers.

He tries to move away, pressing himself back against the door, half in his seat and half on the floor, but the pressure follows, pressing down harder, and for a second, clarity returns to him.

Robin’s only dressed in her bra.

She's climbed across the seat to him, no seatbelts in sight, pressing her shirt against his-

His gunshot wound.

"Shh..." Robin says, smiling encouragingly, pressing harder, and reaching up to wipe at the skin beneath his eye.

His cheeks are wet. Fuck, Billy doesn't know how long he's been crying.

"Come on, don't run away from me. I know how much work you put in to fix this car. Let's try to keep the blood away from the upholstery, huh?"

Billy wheezes out a laugh, and the last thing he hears is Robin shouting at Steve to drive faster.

—

Jim's just parked the Cruiser outside Hawkins Lab when his police radio crackles to life. Owens decided to stay in Hawkins for a while, after the Mindflayer, "just in case".

Jim grabs the radio and speaks into it, "Chief Hopper here, what the hell is it?"

"Hop-" Flo's voice comes from the other side.

Jim sighs, frustrated. "I told you I had stuff to do, I'm sure the others can-"

"Steve Harrington called. From the hospital," she interrupts him.

What the hell did those little shits get into this time...? Today, of all fucking days?

"What did he want?" Jim bites out.

"He said your kids are there, Jim. Both of them. Seemed very important."

What. The. Hell.

"I gotta go," Jim says, pushing the car door open and running into the lab.

Owens made sure they all know him, that they've all seen a picture of him, so that in case of an emergency he won't get holed up in the goddamn reception.

“I need a phone!” he shouts, and the receptionist holds her hand up, waving him towards her. She puts the phone up on the counter between them, and Jim slams in the number to the hospital. In his line of work, it’s a number he has memorised.

“This is Chief Hopper, I need to speak to Steven Harrington.”

It takes a minute, every second feeling like eternity, but then Steve’s voice appears in the other end.

“Hey, Hop, I’m so sorry, I thought you knew, I never would’ve gone with if I knew you didn’t- Or, well, that’s not really true, I mean - But in my defence, that wasn’t my fault, I was-!”

“Kid!” Jim interrupts. “Get to it! I don’t have time for this.”

“Right, sorry, eh... You know the gas station? That we stopped by on the way to Billy’s birthday dinner? You need to get there. There’s an... an exit, into the woods, on the way to the gas station, and it’s filled with the guys who kidnapped El, and you need to get there and like, clear the place, and- Hop, I think I’ve gotta go. The nurses are staring at me. I’m bloody and shirtless and talking about kidnappers and-“

Jim hangs up on him.

He turns to the receptionist, telling her to call Dr. Owens. He needs a

team.

—

Owens insists on his people going first.

Clearing the place out, as Steve said.

Jim drags a hand over his face and sighs and the insanity that is his life.

Owens must've been given the clear, a couple minutes later, because he lays a hand on Jim's shoulder and nods towards the door. Together, the two of them step out of the car and into the building.

"Sir?" One of Owens' men stops them. "I think you would like to see this."

He leads them into a control room, filled with security tapes. Jim falls down into the chair, staring at the screens.

"Can we rewind them?" he asks, to which the man nods. "1:30 pm."

They wind the tapes back to the hour he'd told them, around the time that Jim figures El must've arrived, and indeed, on the tape showing the front of the building, he sees a couple cars pull up. Out of one of them, a man steps out, carrying El in his arms. She's kicking her legs out, trying to climb out of his grasp, but she gets nowhere.

Jim's hand tightens around the armrest until his knuckles turn white.

He watches the other tapes, seeing how the man carries her down the corridors into a room, empty except for a sleeping bag on the floor. He puts her down, and Jim doesn't see what happens, the man obscuring her, but another man steps inside, holding up a syringe and leaning down towards El.

When they step away, she's unconscious. Still, on the dirty floor.

For a split second, he worries she's dead, but it wouldn't make sense for them to go to all this trouble just to kill her out here. And Flo said Steve had both her and Billy.

"Skip forward," Jim says, and then man turns to Owens for confirmation. Owens nods, so they skip until one of the cameras outside catches someone walking, on foot, towards the building. "Stop."

It's Billy. Jim can tell, mostly due to the frankly ridiculous amount of curly hair.

God fucking damnit.

He leans forward, closer to the screen, as the man starts the tape back up and Billy walks up to the door. Doesn't even pause to check if there are any cameras, just waltzes up to the building as though he isn't doing something incredibly dangerous.

At least he doesn't go in through the front door.

During the few seconds it takes Jim to locate which screen shows the corridor with the backdoor, Billy's already sneaked inside. He finds the right one just as Billy opens a door with a bathroom sign.

What the hell, kid?

Nothing happens at first, but then a man appears, walking down the corridor and heading towards the bathroom. Whoever it is that kidnapped El apparently didn't have the time or resources to set up cameras in every room, so Jim can't see what happens in the bathroom. The kidnapper walks in, and Jim thinks he's about to break something for how hard he's clutching at the table.

Minutes that feel like hours go by before the door opens again, and Jim doesn't realise he's been holding his breath until he lets it out in a shaky laugh at seeing Billy step out, dressed in the other man's clothes.

But then he frowns, glancing over Owens' man. The man catches his eye and pauses the tapes. "Did he...?" Jim asks.

"He was still alive when we got here," the other man answers.

'Was'. Meaning he's not anymore. But Billy didn't kill him. Jim's glad for that, at least. The kid feels guilty enough for what happened this past summer without needing to have actually killed anyone by his own free will. Even if it would've been in self defence.

He nods at the other man who starts the tapes again, and Jim turns back to watch.

Billy walks down the corridor, stopping at the next door and standing there for a couple seconds before opening it. Jim can't see what goes on in there, but Billy exits with a mop and bucket. He sticks his head in through another door but doesn't bother stepping inside, until he reaches what Jim realises is the same room that he is now in.

He glances at the other monitors, trying to picture what Billy must've been seeing. El, passed out on the floor of an empty room. Her kidnappers, partying in the cafeteria.

He must've figured something out, because when he leaves the room, it's at an almost sprint, mop and bucket still in each hand. He turns the corner, and again, Jim has to scan the screens to see where he ends up. Another corridor, and another room Billy steps into.

It's a makeshift lab, and it must be important, because there's a camera in there, too. Billy almost turns back, but something must've caught his eye because he stops himself, walking into the room and up to a table. Jim can't make out exactly what's on it, but Billy takes it, stuffing it into his pockets.

He makes quick work of checking the rest of the rooms down the corridor, and for all that Jim's glad Billy hasn't killed anyone - yet - it makes him painfully nervous that Billy isn't at least using the gun he's stolen to at least *pretend* he'll shoot, just in case the rooms aren't as empty as they turn out to be.

His musings are cut short when Billy stands ramrod straight, and then quickly opens the door closest and hurries inside. Jim understands why a second later, as another man appears around the corner. Billy had heard him coming.

The man walks past the room Billy's hiding in, stopping in the middle of the corridor.

And Jim sees Billy open the door, sees him slip out with the gun in one hand and mop in the other. He holds the gun out in front of him, and just as the man starts to turn, Billy raises the mop and hits him in the head with it. The man falls to the ground, unconscious.

Billy kicks at him with his foot, once, before crouching down to grab the man's gun. Smart kid.

He seems to have abandoned caution after that, though, taking to running down the next corridor and pulling each door open, one after

the other. Halfway down, Billy stops and steps inside.

Instinctively, Jim turns to the screen picturing El's room, and sees Billy fall to his knees beside her, shaking her shoulder.

It takes a minute - a minute *too long* - for El to react, but then she does, waking with a start, and Billy moves so Jim can't make her out. But he helps her up, leaving the mop and checking the corridor's empty before leading her out. They go the same way Billy came, but instead of walking down the road, Billy leads her around the building and up towards the woods.

They've run uphill, just past the tree line, when two men appear, running after them with guns raised.

And Jim feels his heart stop when one of the grainy figures stumbles. He can't tell if it's El or Billy, can only see their legs, their upper bodies out of frame, but they both turn, and El must've used her powers because her kidnappers turn on each other and shoot.

And one of them, one of Jim's kids, falls to their knees and stays there, the other one running just far enough that Jim can't see them. He can't breathe, his lungs aren't taking in any oxygen, not until...

Not until the other figure stands, and disappears into the woods.

Steve called from the hospital. Steve's at the hospital. With both of Jim's kids. They're at the hospital. And Steve had been shirtless, and

bloody, and he'd been at the hospital.

It hasn't really clicked until now.

Jim had just focused on... on the fact that Steve had the both of them, and that Jim wanted revenge, that he wanted to stop the ones who took his daughter, and he didn't think about-

Shit.

The chair he sits on screeches across the floor as he pushes himself up to standing.

"Jim-" Owens starts, but he holds his hand up as he walks the short distance to the door.

"I'll be at Hawkins Memorial."

—

Jim rushes into the emergency room, scanning the waiting room for a bloody Steve Harrington, or El, or Billy, or hell, anyone he knows.

But none of them are there.

So Jim hurries to the nurse's station, his heart in his throat.

"J-Jane Hopper, or, or William-"

"William Hargrove?" the nurse asks, and Jim's breath catches. Hawkins a small town, the nurse obviously recognises Jim, and they all know he adopted Billy.

He nods, quickly.

"Steve Harrington brought him in earlier," she says. "Your... daughter, wasn't with them, but he did ask me to give you this after he called you."

She hands him a note, and Jim isn't ashamed to say that his hand shakes when he takes it and sees the dried bloody fingerprints on it. It's folded three times, and Jim almost rips it in his haste to see what it says.

'Robin's staying with El at the cabin. I'm bringing Max there.

- Steve'

Fuck. Okay. One less problem to worry about.

Jim stuffs the note into his back pocket and looks back up at the nurse. "Billy?"

She nods, her eyes serious. "He had a bullet wound in his upper arm when he was brought in, and-"

Jim's hearing leaves him. His grain goes blank. He's numb.

Billy's been shot.

Shit. Shit. No .

Not his kid, fuck. And he'd- shit, last they'd spoken, Jim had been angry, and then Billy, Billy had walked straight into danger like the stupid, brave teenager he is, just to save El, instead of waiting for Jim, he'd used Robin and Steve as backup, and they hadn't even followed him into the kidnapper's den, Billy had gone alone, because he's so, so-

Jim's been led to Billy's hospital room. It's... It's Billy's third fucking hospital room in one year, and she's opening the door for him and ushering him inside, leaving him alone with Billy, and Jim had been sure Billy would still be asleep.

Had been counting on it.

Counting on having the time to take in the damage without Billy noticing him, on having the time to gather his thoughts and figure out what to say so he doesn't make the same mistake as when El and Mike got too much for him, but shit.

Billy's awake, in a hospital gown under a hospital blanket, with hospital grade bandages and gauze covering his arm from elbow to shoulder, and he's got an IV in the other, turning his head to gaze lazily at Jim.

"Hi, Hop," he says, and smiles loopily, probably high as a kite on pain meds.

And Jim?

Jim erupts.

"What the hell where you thinking?! Doing something so stupid?!"

Most of the haze seems to clear from Billy's eyes, and he becomes more alert. " *What?* " he says, and he sounds angry.

Oh, wow. That's... laughable, really.

"You were shot! You could've died! I-I could've been at the morgue

right now..." his voice breaks, because fuck, Jim's already had to bury one kid, and he has to take a second to breathe before continuing. "You went in there, alone, having no idea how many people were there, and they were fucking armed, Billy, all of them--"

"And I fought two of them and won."

"It doesn't matter," Jim breathes, seething. Worried. Scared, even though Billy's still here, is feeling well enough for a shouting match. His brain can't stop thinking about what *could* have happened, can't stop replaying those moments when Billy wavered and fell to his knees on the security tapes. "You should've had backup--"

"Steve and Robin were waiting with the car running, they--"

"*That's not enough* . You're teenagers! All of you! You should've had an adult, you should've- Should've taken me--"

"I tried to call you!" Billy shouts at the top of his lungs. "I-I called you, and I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't even let me finish speaking before you hanged up!"

He won't look at Jim once his finished, but Jim can see his working. His hands are trembling, clenched into fists atop the blanket. There are stray curls falling in his eyes, his red rimmed eyes, like he's been crying.

For all the worry and fear Jim's feeling, he can't imagine what Billy

must've felt. Guilt for El being taken, fear that Jim would hurt him like Neil used to, helplessness from Jim not letting him help, worry for El, fear of going there, fighting for his life, finding her, being shot. It must've reminded him of the Mindflayer. He must've thought he was about to die. Jim's been shot, years ago, when he first became a cop, back before Sara, and he still remembers the pain of it.

Suddenly exhausted, he falls into the chair pulled up close to Billy's bed. He leans his head back, staring up at the ceiling, and sighs.

He's an idiot. He's such an idiot.

When he looks back at the bed, Billy's turned his head to face him, and he looks so tired. So young, and a little fearful still, a little apprehensive, but mostly just so... so, so tired.

"I'm sorry," Jim says, and Billy's eyes widen in surprise. He hopes one day, Billy will stop being so shocked when people apologise to him. "I saw the security tapes, and I was so, so worried." He takes a breath. "What you did was incredibly stupid, and I stand by that, but it was also incredibly brave, and I am... so proud of you. I am always proud of you."

Billy sucks in a breath through his teeth. "I'm sorry, too," he says. "I shouldn't have gone without you. Or... or maybe Murray."

Jim can't help but chuckle. "I think Nancy would've probably have been more useful. She's the only one out of you lot who is any good at shooting. That's a joke, by the way! I don't want any of you to put yourselves in danger. But let's... let's agree that we're both stupid

when we're worried or scared, and we'll work on it. We'll get better. Yeah?"

Billy nods, swallows. "Yeah. Okay."

"How you feeling, kid?"

"Sore," Billy says, and yawns. "Tired. Real tired. Oh, also, if anyone asks, Steve and I were bored, found one of your guns, and decided to practice shooting. An unfortunate accident occurred. I convinced him not to call an ambulance. Trauma or whatever."

Jim snorts, shaking his head. "I'm going to have to go out and shoot some trees by the cabin to make that believable, then?"

"If you want," Billy says, settling down on his side in the bed. "Don't think anyone will bother checking, though. You're the Chief of Police."

That does have its benefits, yes.

"I'm going to sleep now," Billy declares, closing his eyes. He opens them a second later, catching Jim's gaze. "Stay?"

"Of course, Billy. You wouldn't get rid of me even if you tried. I'm just going to sit here and drink in the sight of you being alive and well and a snarky little teen."

Billy smiles and closes his eyes. Jim reaches up to stroke his hair away from his face, and when Billy sighs at the contact, relaxing even further, Jim decides to keep it there, stroking his curls.

“Sleep tight, kid.”

Author's Note:

Alright, I was really unsure. Should I put the “Graphic Depictions of Violence” tag for this one?